

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 PM-03 SP-02 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2427

USDEL JEC PARIS

COMUSSAG NKP THAILAND

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMIPAC HONOLULU HI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 1257

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, VS

SUBJ: MILITARY SITUATION IN MR-3

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION IMMEDIATE SAIGON JAN 31 FROM BIEN HOA
REPEATED FOR YOUR ACTION.

QUOTE

BIEN HOA 072

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, VS

SUBJECT: MILITARY SITUATION IN MR-3

1. THIS MESSAGE SURVEYS THE SITUATION IN MR-3 AS I SEE IT ON THE
EVE OF TET. IT REFLECTS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, INFORMATION AND
IMPRESSIONS RECEIVED DURING VISITS DURING THE PAST WEEK TO ALL
PROVINCE CHIEFS IN MR-3, TO THE COMMANDERS OF THE THREE ARVN
DIVISIONS IN THE REGION, AND TO THE CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT
COMMANDER.

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2. AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF GENERAL PUBLIC CONCERN OVER THE SECURITY SITUATION, GREATER IN URBAN THAN IN RURAL AREAS, FOLLOWING RECENT LOSSES IN MR-3, THE PUBLIC AND THE MILITARY ARE BRACING FOR EVEN HEAVIER NVA/VC PRESSURE EXPECTED IN THE COMING SPRING MONTHS. THE COMMUNISTS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY OBSERVE TET ABOUT A WEEK EARLY AND THE PREVAILING VIEW IN OFFICIAL CIRCLES IS THAT THE PRE-TET AND TET PERIOD WILL SEE SOME NOISY INCIDENTS BUT NOT A MAJOR EFFORT.

3. INFORMED EXPECTATIONS ARE THAT THE HEAVIER EFFORT TO COME WILL CONCENTRATE MORE ON POPULATED AREAS WITH A VIEW TO POLITICAL EFFECTS THAN ON THE MERE ACQUISITION OF UNPOPULATED TERRITORY. THIS WOULD PARTICULARLY INCLUDE SAPPER AND LOCAL UNIT ACTIVITIES IN THE AREAS AROUND SAIGON WITH A VIEW TO FURTHER RAISING PUBLIC APPREHENSION, AND UNDERMINING CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS ABILITY TO PROTECT THE CAPITAL AREA. THIS WOULD NOT EXCLUDE HEAVY ASSAULTS IN TAY NINH PROVINCE AIMED AT ISOLATING, IF NOT TAKING, TAY NINH CITY AND MAIN UNIT PRESSURE ELSEWHERE IN MR-3 WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF EITHER PINNING DOWN REGULAR GOVERNMENT FORCES IN THE PERIPHERAL AREAS, THUS WEAKENING THE CENTER, OR FORCING THE GOVERNMENT TO GIVE UP ADDITIONAL PERIPHERAL AREAS TO THE COMMUNISTS IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE CENTER.

4. THE COMMUNISTS APPEAR TO BE ACHIEVING SOME SUCCESS IN THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL CAMPAIGN, CAPITALIZING ON PUBLIC CONCERN OVER RECENT SETBACKS IN MR-3, INTENDED TO RAISE APPREHENSIONS FOR THE COMING PERIOD. PUBLIC CONCERN IS AGGRAVATED ALSO BY POLITICAL AGITATION OF OPPOSITION PARTIES JOCKEYING FOR POSITION IN THE PRESIDENTIAL AND LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR LATER IN THE YEAR. THE INCREASINGLY BOLD OPPOSITION PRESS ATTACKS ON PRESIDENT THIEU WITH THIRD FORCE THEMES ARE READ AND FELT IN MR-3.

5. THE PROPOSED \$300 MILLION SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION FOR AID TO VIET-NAM HAS BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FRONT AMONG PEOPLE WHO STRONGLY FEEL THE NEED OF SOME GOOD NEWS. I FOUND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL REQUEST AND INTENSE INTEREST IN THE OUTCOME OF THE CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE AT VIRTUALLY ALL LEVELS IN TRAVELLING THROUGHOUT MR-3. THIS ISSUE AND ITS OUTCOME ARE BEING SEEN AS A WEATHERVANE OF USG INTENTION TO SUPPORT OR ABANDON VIETNAM.

6. WITH THE INFILTRATION OF FOUR OR MORE NVA SAPPER BATTALION
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ELEMENTS INTO THE ENVIRONS OF SAIGON--THE 117TH ON THE WEST, THE 115TH ON THE NORTHWEST, THE 119TH ON THE NORTH AND NORTHWEST, AND D-10 ON THE SOUTHEAST, WITH INDICATIONS OF TEAMS ALSO FROM THE 316TH AND A NEW GROUP IDENTIFIED AS THE 195TH COMMANDOS--THE PROSPECT IS FOR INCREASED ACTIVITY IN THE CAPITAL AREA. THE EFFORT WILL INCLUDE FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO BLOW BRIDGES, INTERDICT SECONDARY ROADS (MAIN ROADS CLOSE TO THE CAPITAL, IT IS FELT, WILL BE KEPT OPEN), ASSASSINATE LOCAL OFFICIALS AND POLITICAL FIGURES,

ROCKET TAN SON NHUT AND THE CITY'S OUTSKIRTS, AND, IF POSSIBLE, INTERFERE WITH PEOPLE'S DAILY LIVES THROUGH SUCH THINGS AS INTERRUPTING ELECTRICITY AND WATER SUPPLIES. AS REPORTED ELSEWHERE, HOWEVER, THE CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT COMMANDER HAS TOLD ME THAT ALL OF THE SAPPER INFILTRATION ROUTES ARE WELL IDENTIFIED AND HE IS CONFIDENT THE SITUATION WILL BE KEPT UNDER CONTROL IF THE SITUATION HOLDS WELL IN THE SURROUNDING PROVINCES.

7. IN TAY NINH, INTEREST CURRENTLY CENTERS ON WHETHER THE NVA/VC WILL IN THE FIRST INSTANCE ASSAULT THE CITY DIRECTLY OR MAY FIRST MOUNT CAMPAIGNS IN THE OTHER AREAS OF THE PROVINCE INTENDED TO WEAKEN THE ULTIMATE DEFENSE OF THE CITY. IN THE LATTER REGARD, SOME MR-3 HQ ANALYSTS BELIEVE THAT THE NEXT MAJOR CAMPAIGN IN TAY NINH PROVINCE MAY BE IN THE EASTERN AREAS OF THE PROVINCE BEGINNING IN THE TRI TAM AREA AND MOVING SOUTH THROUGH CAU KHOI (XT 340455) THEN SOUTHWARD ALONG LTL 26 TO THE DISTRICT TOWN OF KHIEM HANH, TOWARD THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF CUTTING ROUTE 1/22 IN THE TRANG BANG/GO DAO HA AREA. THE GOING ASSUMPTION IS THAT A MAJOR ACTION IN TAY NINH PROVINCE WOULD INVOLVE SOME ELEMENT OF THE 9TH NVA DIV-- PRESUMABLY AGAINST SUOI DA ON LTL 13 IF THE TARGET IS TAY NINH CITY IN THE FIRST INSTANCE AND AGAINST BEN CUI/CAU KHOI/KHIEM HANH IF THE FIRST EFFORT IS A MAJOR CAMPAIGN TO CUT ROUTE 1. IN THIS REGARD, GVN FORCES HAVE LOST CONTACT WITH THE 271ST REGT OF THE 9TH DIV WHICH MAY, THEREFORE, BE IN TAY NINH OR PREPARING TO GO THERE. THE 5TH ARVN DIV G-2 HAS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE REGIMENT CROSSED THE SAIGON RIVER BY RAFT INTO TAY NINH PROVINCE WITHIN THE PAST 10 DAYS. THE 101ST NVA REGT PLUS D14 AND D16 NVA BNS WOULD BE PART OF ANY EFFORT IN EASTERN TAY NINH PROVINCE. AN ASSAULT AGAINST TAY NINH CITY IS EXPECTED TO INVOLVE THE 205TH INDEPENDENT REGT ATTACKING FROM THE NORTHWEST AND WEST AND OTHER HEAVY FORCES (PRESUMABLY FROM THE 9TH DIV) ATTACKING THROUGH SUOI DA FROM THE NORTHEAST. THE 25TH DIV COMMANDER AND PROVINCE CHIEF HAVE SAID THEY BELIEVE THEY CAN DEAL WITH THE SITUATION IF NO MORE THAN ONE

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9TH DIV REGT IS ADDED TO THE 205TH, 101ST AND OTHER FORCES WHICH USUALLY OPERATE IN THE PROVINCE.

8. THE REOPENING OF ROUTE 333 FROM ROUTE 1 TO HOAI DUC IN BINH TUY PROVINCE BY THE 18TH DIV HAS BEEN ONE OF THE FEW ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RECENT PAST. IT IS BEING OVERSHADOWED, HOWEVER, BY INCREASING INDICATIONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ATTEMPT THE RECOVERY OF THANH LINH EAST OF HOAI DUC IN THE NEAR FUTURE, BY THE NEED TO KEEP TWO REGIMENTS OF THE 18TH DIV ON THE ROAD FOR LACK OF OTHER FORCES CAPABLE OF HOLDING IT, AND BY REVERSES IN LONG KHANH PROVINCE CLOSER TO HOAI DUC AND SAIGON.

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ACTION EA-06

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2428

USDEL JEC PARIS

COMUSSAG NKP THAILAND

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMIPAC HONOLULU HI

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 1257

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9. IN RETAKING ROUTE 333 AND IN THE PRECEDING HOAI DUC BATTLE, THE 18TH DIV APPEARS TO HAVE BADLY HURT THE 274TH AND 33RD NVA REGTS. THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT ELEMENTS OF ONE OR BOTH OF THOSE REGIMENTS WERE BEING WITHDRAWN FROM THE ROUTE 333/HOAI DUC AREAS. THE EVIDENCE ALSO INDICATES, HOWEVER, THAT 274TH OR 33RD UNITS WERE INVOLVED IN SUCCESSFUL NVA ACTIONS IN LONG KHANH, INCLUDING THE TAKING OF BAU CHANH HAMLET 8 KMS NORTHEAST OF THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL AND ROCKETING OF THE CAPITAL WITHIN THE PAST WEEK. THERE ARE ALSO SOME SIGNS THAT ELEMENTS OF ONE OR BOTH OF THESE REGIMENTS MAY BE RETURNING TO PHUOC TUY PROVINCE, PRESUMABLY FOR DIVERSIONARY ACTIONS WHICH WOULD FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO DECIDE BETWEEN DEFENDING THE PERIPHERY OR THE CENTER OF MR-3. A LIKELY SCENARIO WOULD BE FOR THE 274TH TO WORK IN THE LONG KHANH OR PHUOC TUY AND FOR THE 33RD TO COME SOUTH FROM ROUTE 333 TO INTERDICT AND HARASS ROUTE 1 AND THE RESETTLEMENT SITE AREA IN LONG KHANH AND BINH TUY WHILE REMAINING CLOSE ENOUGH TO RETURN TO ROUTE 333 AND HOAI DUC IF THE 18TH DIV IS PULLED OUT TO MEET REQUIREMENTS NEARER THE CENTER.

10. IN THE EASTERN PROVINCES OF MR-3, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOAI DUC-THANH LINH AREA TO THE NVA BECOMES CLEARER. IT OCCUPIES A CENTRAL POSITION BETWEEN ROUTE 20 TO DALAT AND ROUTE 1 TO MR-2
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APART FROM REPRESENTING A RICE-RICH LAND AREA TO WHICH THE COMMUNISTS MIGHT ATTRACT SOME PEOPLE TO REMAIN UNDER COMMUNIST ADMINISTRATION. THIS GENERAL AREA ALSO ABUTS WAR ZONE D IN NORTHERN LONG KHANH PROVINCE AND EXTENSION OF NVA CONTROL TO HOAI DUC WOULD GIVE IT A WIDE SWATH OF TERRITORY FROM THE CAMBODIAN BORDER THROUGH PHUOC LONG PROVINCE, WAR ZONE D AND NORTHERN BINH TUY PROVINCE COMING CLOSE TO THE SEA AND AFFORDING INCREASED POSSIBILITY OF CUTTING SOUTH VIET-NAM IN THAT AREA. THE NEW NVA/VC EASTERN REGION DIVISION, ENCOMPASSING THE 33RD, 274TH, AND 812TH REGTS HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE 6TH DIV.

11. SPECULATION CONTINUES OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF NVA/VC ATTACKS TO WIPE OUT THE GVN ENCLAVES AT AN LOC AND CHON THANH IN BINH LONG PROVINCE. SIX GVN RANGER AND 3 RF BNS--ROUGHLY EQUAL TO THE INFANTRY STRENGTH OF A GVN DIV--ARE TIED UP IN THE DEFENSE OF THESE TWO ENCLAVES WHICH SEEM TO HAVE MORE PSYCHOLOGICAL THAN MILITARY VALUE FOR THE GVN. THE VIEW OF GVN ANALYSTS AT MR-3 AT THE MOMENT IS THAT THE NVA REGARD THE TAKING OF THESE TWO PLACES AS TOO EXPENSIVE AGAINST THE STRONG GVN FORCES THERE AND THAT FOR THE MOMENT DO NOT REGARD THEM AS HAVING ADEQUATE MILITARY OR PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE FOR THE PRICE THE NVA WOULD HAVE TO PAY.

12. THERE IS NO INDICATION NOW OF ANY MAJOR NVA EFFORT IN THE NEAR FUTURE IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE, NORTHERN HAU NGHIA PROVINCE, AND THE SAIGON RIVER CORRIDOR. THE 95C REGT OF THE 9TH NVA DIV APPEARS TO BE THINLY SPREAD FROM THE IRON TRIANGLE SOUTHWEST OF BEN CAT IN A SEMI-CIRCLE EXTENDING ALL THE WAY NORTH OF LAI KHE WITH NO CURRENT SIGNS OF AGGRESSIVE INTENTIONS BEYOND HARASSMENT. THE 272ND REGT OF THE 9TH DIV APPEARS TO BE ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF ROUTE 13 NORTH OF LAI KHE, PRESUMABLE SERVING AS A BLOCKING FORCE AGAINST ANY ATTEMPT BY THE 5TH ARVN DIV TO GO NORTH TO CHON THANH WHILE THE NVA IS CONCENTRATING FORCES MORE ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN PERIPHERY OF THE AREA THAN IN THE CENTER.

13. THERE SIMILARLY APPEARS TO BE NO INDICATION OF NEAR-TERM ACTION AGAINST PHU GIAO IN NORTHEASTERN BINH DUONG PROVINCE. THE 209TH REGT OF THE 7TH DIV IS NORTH OF PHU GIAO AND IT SEEMS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT AT LEAST ONE REGT OF THE 7TH DIV (141ST OR 165TH) WOULD BE OCCUPIED IN PHUOC LONG PROVINCE TO CONSOLIDATE AFTER THE RECENT NVA TAKEOVER. MR-3 HQ HAS NO CURRENT INFORMATION ON THE LOCATION OF THE REMAINING REGT OF THE 7TH DIV BEYOND ONE

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UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT THE 7TH DIV MAY BE SENT INTO QUANG DUC PROVINCE JUST NORTHEAST OF PHUOC LONG TO TAKE THE REST OF ROUTE 14, AND GIVE THE NVA FREE USE OF THE ROAD FROM MR-2 ALL THE WAY TO CHON THANH IN MR-3. SOME SENIOR OFFICERS THINK THAT

THIS DEVELOPMENT, IF CONFIRMED, MIGHT GIVE GVN FORCES IN MR-3
A GOOD OPENING TO PUSH NORTHWARD FROM PHU GIAO AND FROM LAI
KHE IN THE CENTER. THIS WOULD RELIEVE THE NVA MAIN FORCE PRESSURE
EXPECTED AT TAY NINH IN THE WEST AND BINH TUY, LONG KHANH,
AND PHUOC TUY IN THE EAST IN CONCERT WITH HEAVY SAPPER ACTIVITY
AROUND SAIGON. OTHER MR-3 OFFICERS QUESTION WHETHER SVN FORCES
SHOULD BE RISKED IN SUCH AN OPERATION IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES.
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